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2002HANOI00528 - CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	FBIE-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	VCE-00	NSAE-00	SSO-00
	SS-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/002W

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5712
INFO AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
NSC WASHDC
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000528

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL/IRF, PRM (P.LEWIS)

E.O. 12958: DECLASS 3/8/12
TAGS: [PREF PHUM PREL PGOV PINS SOCI VM CB ETMIN HUMANR RELFREE](#)
SUBJECT: VIETNAM'S CENTRAL HIGHLANDS: WHAT DID WE
LEARN?

REF: A) HO CHI MINH CITY 00201, 00202, 00203

B) HO CHI MINH CITY 00039

CLASSIFIED BY: EMI LYNN YAMAUCHI, CONSUL GENERAL,
REASON 1.5(D)

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: DURING A 2.5-DAY VISIT TO DAK LAK, GIA LAI, AND KON TUM PROVINCES, CONGENOFFS MET WITH MONTAGNARD RETURNEES FROM CAMBODIA AND WITH PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S COMMITTEES. REFTELS A ARE THE DETAILED ACCOUNTS. THESE ARE OUR CONCLUSIONS. ECONOMIC HARDSHIP AND LAND DISPUTES SEEM TO BE THE PRIMARY REASONS WHY THIS GROUP OF RETURNEES HAD LEFT. WE FOUND THE PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES WELL-INTENTIONED ABOUT PROVIDING MATERIAL SUPPORT TO THEIR RETURNEES, BUT WORRIED ABOUT RESOURCES FOR THE LONG-TERM. THERE WAS NO ATMOSPHERE OF OVERT FEAR OR REPRESSION IN THE THREE VILLAGES WE VISITED, NOR DID ANY RETURNEES CLAIM PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT AT THE HANDS OF VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) ECONOMICS, NOT RELIGION: UNLIKE MANY OF THOSE ETHNIC MINORITIES WHO FLED VIETNAM DURING SPRING 2001, WE BELIEVE THE RETURNEES WE MET LEFT PRIMARILY FOR ECONOMIC REASONS. THEY GREW COFFEE, COTTON, CORN, AND CASSAVA, CROPS WHOSE PRICES HAD DIPPED OR WHICH WERE NOT BIG MONEYMAKERS TO BEGIN WITH. THE CHAIRMAN OF DAK LAK'S COMMITTEE ON RELIGION ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE HAD BEEN COMPLAINTS ABOUT ECONOMIC HARDSHIP IN THE VILLAGES.

13. (C) SOME VILLAGE LAND ALLOCATIONS WERE ON THE SMALL SIDE - GIVEN LARGE FAMILY SIZE (5.5 CHILDREN AMONG ETHNIC MINORITIES IN KON TUM). WE HEARD ABOUT ONE SPECIFIC LAND DISPUTE INVOLVING ETHNIC MINORITIES - AS PLAINTIFFS, DEFENDANTS, AND CORRUPT LOCAL OFFICIALS.

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ETHNIC MINORITY VILLAGE AND COMMUNE LEADERS "SOLD" LAND BELONGING TO ANOTHER VILLAGER WITHOUT HIS PERMISSION, AND ISSUED LAND-USE CERTIFICATES TO THE NEW ETHNIC MINORITY OWNERS. ACCORDING TO THE VILLAGER'S WIFE, HE LEFT FOR CAMBODIA WHEN HIS SECOND PETITION FOR A HEARING HAD GONE UNANSWERED.

14. (SBU) WE DO NOT BELIEVE RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION WAS THE REASON THESE VILLAGERS LEFT VIETNAM. MOST OF THE VILLAGERS WE MET DURING THE TRIP WERE PROTESTANTS (NOT PARTICULARLY SURPRISING BECAUSE ETHNIC MINORITIES COMPRISE A SIZEABLE PERCENTAGE OF PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC BELIEVERS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS), WHO PRACTICED THEIR FAITH IN VARYING DEGREES. THE RETURNEES ANSWERED OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT RELIGION MATTER-OF-FACTLY AND CALMLY. RESIDENTS OF ONE VILLAGE TOOK CONGENOFFS TO THEIR WORSHIP HOUSE. ALL OF THE

PROTESTANT RETURNEES WE SPOKE TO SAID THEY WERE
ALLOWED TO PRACTICE THEIR FAITH, WITH ONE EXCEPTION.

15. (C) ONE RETURNEE SAID THAT IT WAS "DIFFICULT" FOR HIM TO
PRACTICE HIS FAITH BOTH BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE AND AFTER HIS
RETURN FROM CAMBODIA, BUT HE DID NOT/COULD NOT GIVE US
FURTHER DETAILS.

16. (SBU) ARE THE RETURNEES/VILLAGERS AFRAID?: WE DID
NOT DETECT OVERT FEAR AMONG THE VILLAGERS. SOME
TENSION AND CONFUSION AMONG THE RETURNEES, PERHAPS, AS
THEY WERE NOT CERTAIN WHY THEIR VILLAGE CHIEFS WERE
SUMMONING THEM TO MEETINGS. WE SAW NO UNIFORMED
MILITARY OR SECURITY IN THE VILLAGES, AND PEOPLE WERE
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NOT LOOKING BACK OVER THEIR SHOULDERS AS THEY SPOKE
WITH US. IN THE CASE OF THE GIA LAI RETURNEES, THEY
HAD BARELY BEEN BACK IN THEIR VILLAGES FOR 18 HOURS,
BEFORE THEY HAD TO PACK UP GAIN TO COME MEET WITH US.

17. (C) WE LOOKED FOR ANY SIGNS OF BEATINGS (LIMPS,
BRUISES, ETC.) ESPECIALLY ON ANY RETURNEES WHO WERE
WEARING SHORT-SLEEVED SHIRTS OR SHORTS. WE DID NOT
SEE ANY. THE ONLY VILLAGERS WHO CLAIMED PHYSICAL
ABUSE WERE THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAD BEEN BEATEN IN THE
CAMBODIAN CAMP BY OTHER ETHNIC MINORITY REFUGEES, WHO
DID NOT WANT THEM TO RETURN TO VIETNAM.

18. (SBU) WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE OF PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL
OFFICIALS?: THE PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S COMMITTEES
CONSIDER THEMSELVES KINGS OF THE HILL IN THEIR
PROVINCES. IT WAS ONLY WITH PERSISTENT PRESSURE FROM
THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT THAT THEY AGREED TO MEET WITH
US. IN THE WORDS OF ONE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, "EVEN IF
THE FOREIGN MINISTER HIMSELF CALLED ME, I STILL CALL
THE SHOTS." THIS CHAIRMAN DID, IN THE END, AGREE TO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 HANOI 000528

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MEET WITH US. THIS AND OTHER STATEMENTS LEAD US TO
BELIEVE THAT PROVINCIAL, DISTRICT, COMMUNE AND
VILLAGE-LEVEL LEADERS PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN HOW
RETURNEES ARE TREATED - REGARDLESS OF INSTRUCTIONS
FROM THE GVN.

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19. (SBU) PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES INSISTED ON THEIR
GOOD INTENTIONS IN DEALING WITH ETHNIC MINORITY ISSUES. THE
CHAIRMAN OF DAK LAK'S COMMITTEE ON RELIGION
ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WHILE ETHNIC MINORITY POLICIES HAD
GOOD INTENTIONS, IMPLEMENTATION VARIED, AND IN SOME
INSTANCES "WAS NOT COMPLETE." THAT IS AN
UNDERSTATEMENT. WE DO NOT SEE HOW PROVINCIAL
AUTHORITIES ON DOWN (WITH A VERY SMALL TAX BASE - NO
LARGE CORPORATIONS TO TAX, NEXT TO NO FDI, AND ETHNIC
MINORITY POPULATIONS MOSTLY EXEMPT FROM TAXES) CAN
LONG SUSTAIN THE SPECIAL ETHNIC MINORITY PROGRAMS THEY
OPERATE, LET ALONE IMPROVE THEIR STANDARD OF LIVING.
CURRENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS RUN THE GAMUT FROM MICRO-
LENDING TO SUSPENDING PAYMENTS ON LOANS TO
OUTRIGHT DONATIONS OF RICE, CLOTHING, SEEDS, AND CASH.

110. (C) LOCAL AUTHORITIES COMPLAINED ABOUT HOW THE
ETHNIC MINORITIES SPENT THE CASH ON "BOOZE AND BIKES",
BUT THEIR REAL WORRY WAS ELSEWHERE. AT LEAST TWO
COMMUNE AND PROVINCIAL-LEVEL OFFICIALS SAID THEY DID
NOT KNOW IF THEY COULD CONTINUE TO SUPPORT RETURNEE
FAMILIES IF THEIR FIELDS WERE NOT PLANTED BEFORE THE

RAINY SEASON BEGINS. HAVING SEEN THE HARDSCRABBLE
EXISTENCE IN THESE VILLAGES, THAT RINGS TRUE.

11. (U) DAK LAK, GIA LAI, AND KON TUM PROVINCES ARE
AMONG THE POOREST IN VIETNAM. DESPITE THE WONDERS OF
ELECTRICITY, TELEVISION, AND MOTORBIKES, THE VILLAGES
WE VISITED SEEM CUT OFF FROM EACH OTHER. THEIR LIVES
ARE CIRCUMSCRIBED BY "60 METERS", IN THE WORDS OF ONE
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VILLAGE CHIEF.

12. (C) THE EDUCATION LEVEL AMONG THE RETURNEES WE MET
WAS ANYWHERE FROM ZERO TO FOURTH GRADE. THESE ARE NOT
STUPID PEOPLE, BUT THEIR SENSE OF TIME AND SPACE IS
VERY DIFFERENT FROM OURS. THEIR ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND
CONDITIONAL OR HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS IS ALMOST NON-
EXISTENT. OR AT LEAST NON-EXISTENT IN THE VIETNAMESE
LANGUAGE. LIKEWISE THEIR ABILITY TO ANALYZE OR ANSWER
"WHY". SOME QUESTIONS HAD TO BE REPEATED, REFINED,
AND REDUCED TO THE MINIMUM.

13. (C) HOW USEFUL ARE THESE TRIPS TO THE CENTRAL
HIGHLANDS?: WE BELIEVE THESE TRIPS - EVEN WITHOUT
COMPLETE ACCESS OR PRIVACY - ARE WORTHWHILE. WE
ACTUALLY SEE CONDITIONS IN THE VILLAGE, INTERACT WITH
RESIDENTS, AND EXPERIENCE THE REMOTENESS/ISOLATION
THAT CHARACTERIZE THEIR LIVES. THIS GIVES US THE
CONTEXT IN WHICH TO JUDGE THE VARIOUS STORIES, RUMORS,
AND RHETORIC WE HEAR. HOWEVER, OUR ABILITY TO ASSESS
THE VERACITY OF THE INFORMATION WE OBTAIN IS LIMITED,
GIVEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES DESCRIBED IN REFTELS A.
THEREFORE WE PREFER TO RELY ON THE "FRIENDS OF
FRIENDS" WHO TRAVEL DOWN FROM THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS
THREE OR FOUR TIMES A YEAR - OR ON MINORITY CONTACTS
IN HCMC WHO HEAR THINGS FROM THEIR FAMILIES.

14. (U) WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?: IF THE GVN AGREES TO MEET WITH
US, AMBASSADOR AND CONGEN PLAN TO TRAVEL TO THE CENTRAL
HIGHLANDS OVER EASTER.
BURGHARDT

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